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Watching Americans Abroad

CIA Got Foreign Aid In Tracking Dissidents

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New York Times News Service

The CIA apparently made use of friendly foreign intelligence services to help it obtain information about U.S. citizens traveling abroad, according to documents that the agency has declassified but not made public.

The documents concern Operation Chaos, the government's counter-intelligence program against anti-war activists and others it considered "radicals" in the late 1960s and early '70s, and which a commission headed by then Vice President Nelson Rockefeller concluded was "beyond the proper scope of CIA activity."

The number of U.S. citizens checked by the foreign agencies could not be determined from the CIA documents.

THE DOCUMENTS were provided on Dec. 30, 1976, to attorneys representing plaintiffs in a civil suit that has been filed against present and former government officials believed to have been involved in Operation Chaos, but their release to the public has been barred temporarily by a "gag order" issued by a local district court judge. The New York Times did not receive its information from any person covered by the court's gag order.

The names of the foreign agencies that apparently assisted the CIA have been censored from the documents and replaced only with the designation "(B)." In a statement that accompanied the documents, attorneys for the CIA said that the "(B)," when used in this context, represented "an intelligence or security service of a foreign government in liaison with the CIA, or information obtained from such liaison."

Although many details of the counter-intelligence program were made public through investigations by the Rockefeller commission and House and Senate committees, it was not previously known that the CIA had used foreign agencies to help it collect this information.

In the past, the CIA has been particularly sensitive about revealing details of its relationships with other intelligence agencies. A chief reason, CIA officials have said privately, is that it fears the foreign agencies will be reluctant to share information, out of concern that the CIA will not be able to keep it secret.

THE DOCUMENTS released by the CIA make several references to assistance by foreign intelligence agencies in connection with Operation Chaos, but do not disclose the names of the agencies or the extent of their help.

A June 30, 1969, memorandum from the CIA to Tom Charles Huston, then a special assistant to President Richard Nixon, says that "existing agency collective resources are being employed wherever feasible and new sources are being sought through independent means as well as with the assistance of foreign intelligence services and the Federal Bureau of Investigation."